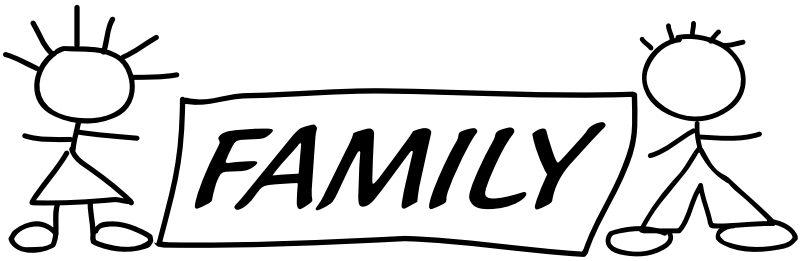


FUNdamentals for Literacy

Introduction

How to Use This Notebook

The *FAMILY FUNdamentals for Literacy* contains over 500 activities families can do together to support literacy instruction in the classroom. Each activity is aligned to skills and interventions included in the *Michigan Literacy Progress Profile* (*MLPP*).

When should these activities be used?

The *FAMILY FUNdamentals* will be most effective when it is part of an *individualized instruction plan* that matches interventions to assessed need, as revealed through the *MLPP*. After using *MLPP* to assess student need, use these tools to

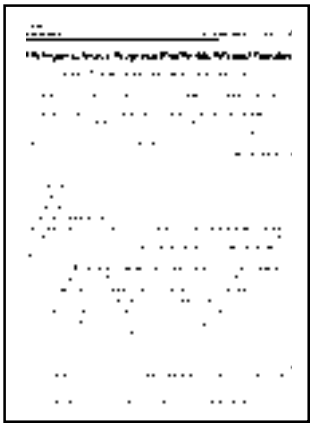
- communicate better with parents about their child's progress and
- offer parents meaningful ways to work with their child outside the classroom.

Cover letter, p. 1

What's in the notebook?

The Introduction contains several helpful articles about Balanced Literacy and how to work more effectively with families. It also includes several lists of references for more information about research-based reading instruction, family literacy and organizations you may want to contact.

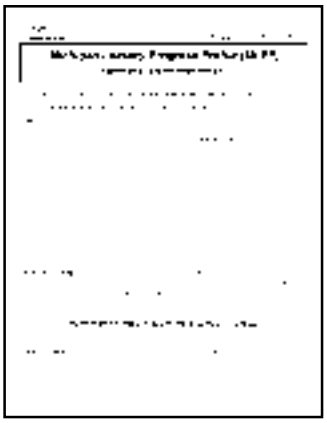
The Activities are divided into sections based on the 11 milestone and enabling skills tested in the *MLPP*. At the beginning of *each* section, you will find a four-page cover letter to send home with parents each time you give them activities from that skill area. It includes background information about the *MLPP*; a description of the child's assessed progress and your plan for instruction at school; a description of the skill area(s) you are trying to develop (e.g. Concepts of Print, Comprehension, etc.); and resources and tips for parents in working with their children on literacy. These are followed by actual activities, as suggested by the *MLPP* interventions. These may be copied and given to parents in your classroom as often as you like.



Cover letter, p. 2

Appendix A includes supplemental material that may help parents complete selected activities. For example, some activities in the Letter-Sound category ask parents to use pictures of objects to match sounds, etc. Picture cards, game cards, book lists, and other pages are included here. Feel free to supplement these with materials from your own library.

Appendix B includes additional information for parents about reading and about working with their kids at home.



Cover letter pg. 3

What's on the compact disc?

The compact disc version of *FAMILY FUNdamentals for Literacy* includes all the resources and activities found in the notebook. In addition, you will find:

- easy-to-use tools to search for the activities you need
- video clips of some of the document's contributors
- Michigan's English Language Arts Standards
- Links to additional literacy resources for teachers

How are activities organized in each section?

The activities are arranged in roughly the same sequence as the *MLPP* assessment notebook. This means that activities for younger students (or those at earlier reading skill levels) *generally*, would come earlier in each section, with activities for older children nearer the end of each section. *But that is not always the case.* You will have to look over the activities to see which ones *you* believe will be most appropriate for an individual child.

NOTE: Some activities may be used to promote more than one kind of skill. For example, some "concepts of print" activities talk about identifying letters of the alphabet. These could also be used to practice letter-sound identification. Be sure to look through related skill areas for additional activities.

Who created the activities?

Most activities came from the files and imaginations of teachers who participate on the MDE Early Literacy Committee. Many of the activities were adapted from the School Home Links Kits, published by the Department of Education Partnership for Family Involvement in Education.

What kinds of activities are in here?

Our contributors tried to choose a variety of activities to appeal to a wide range of families. Some, especially those adapted from the School Home Links Activities, are short, prescriptive activities that research shows will appeal to even the most reluctant families. They are quick (they can be completed in about ten minutes), require few materials and are fairly simple to understand.

Others are more descriptive and open-ended. These activities tend to be more game- or action-oriented. They bring reading and language activities into all parts of life, so may have a greater impact in the long run. However, these activities sometimes ask more from parents. Use your judgment as you choose activities appropriate for each family and child. You may want to provide more support for families who struggle with reading themselves.

How do I start?

1. After you have assessed a student using *MLPP*, read the family interventions listed in the instructional strategies section of *MLPP*.

2. Each activity in the *FAMILY FUNdamentals for Literacy* notebook is aligned with these *MLPP* parent interventions. Simply open the notebook to the appropriate section and select the activities you feel would be appropriate and interesting for your student.


Sample Activity

3. Photocopy the four-page cover letter at the beginning of the section. Then remove and copy your selected activities. You may copy these activities as many times as you wish *for instructional purposes only*.

4. Meet with the child's parents, grandparents or other caring adults. You might want to consider hosting a family literacy evening, to give all parents an overview of the notebook and what they can expect to see during the coming weeks. Then, when appropriate, give individual families the activities you've chosen for their child, along with cover letters and supplemental materials from Appendix A or B (as desired or as appropriate). Talk about your assessment of their child's progress and how it will shape instruction in the classroom. Enlist their help at home, explaining that the child will make faster progress if s/he is able to practice what s/he is learning at home. Remind them that it needn't take hours each day—just some new ways of talking, listening and reading together. Some activities take as little as ten minutes a day, and some can be done while you eat dinner or ride to soccer practice!

   * Always try to give activities to parents in person so you can answer questions and listen to parents' ideas or concerns. Remember, this is a *dialogue.* You are laying the groundwork for a *team* effort in improving the child's reading and writing.

Is that all?

Getting families to engage in literacy activities is great, of course. Just as important, though, is building stronger relationships between home and school. That's why each cover letter and activity includes a parent response form. Encourage your families to complete those and send them back to school. Hearing from parents—and carefully considering what they say—can help in a number of ways:

- You will know if the behaviors you observe at school are also observed at home.
- You will communicate to families that their observations and opinions are significant.
- You will learn if the activities are being done and if the student learned from them or enjoyed them.
- You may learn from parents better ways of working with this child.

- You may find out if further intervention may be required (parent peer support, introducing the parent to the school media specialist to help choose appropriate books, outside tutoring, etc.)
- You will build stronger partnerships for student success that can last throughout this student's academic career.

What if I don't like the activities in the notebook?

Create your own! In fact, each section includes a blank page that you can copy as many times as you like and make up your own activities, based on the interests and needs of the students you choose to work with. You are also free to modify the existing activities to better meet your needs and the needs of your students.

Share your ideas with others!

If you write an activity that proves especially fun or effective, we invite you share it. We also are interested in hearing about tips you have for other teachers about how to improve the way parents and schools can work together.

Send tips or activities to: Partnership For Learning, 321 N. Pine, Lansing, MI 48933. Or submit them on Partnership For Learning's website at www.PartnershipForLearning.org.

Be sure to sign your name. Your activity may be chosen to be included in the next draft of *FAMILY FUNdamentals for Literacy*!

A few words about Phonemic Awareness

If you've used older versions of *MLPP*, you'll notice the new version now makes a distinction between Phonological Awareness and Phonemic Awareness. Accordingly, we've also tried to define the distinction for parents in the introductory pages included in that section. Since there is a lot of confusion regarding these terms and their relationship to phonics, we've also defined phonics in these pages. However, this section does *not* include phonics-type activities. These may be found in the Letter-Sound Identification section, since they help students attend to print in addition to sounds.

What if some parents won't get involved?

Almost all children have some network of adult support. Try to identify at least one caring adult in this child's life who would be willing to lend support outside the classroom. But first, read Patricia Edwards' column and other tips in the Introduction. Check out the resources for ideas for working with parents. There may be some simple efforts you can try that will make parents feel welcomed into this joint project of helping their children read well and independently by the end of third grade.

What if parents can't read well themselves?

We have tried very hard to make these activities "user friendly" and easy to read. If they are still too difficult for some adult readers, you may want to model the activity in the classroom with

family members watching. Or try enlisting the help of a neighbor or friend in the school who might be willing to serve as a mentor for the family. Reach out to adult literacy programs in the area who may be able to give you tips on how parents can work with their children, even if they struggle with reading themselves.

What if families are English Language Learners?

Eventually, we hope to add activities to the notebook that will specifically address the special needs of English Language Learners. For now, ELL master teachers have suggested the following tips for working with families:

- Encourage parents to continue to develop their child's primary language at home.
- Discuss worksheets in both their primary language and English. Concrete objects and real-life experiences or situations should be used as examples. Vocabulary should be presented in the context of a sentence.
- Parents who have limited English capability should read wordless books and tell stories to their children.
- Children should be encouraged to make their own sets of flashcards and picture dictionaries.
- Suggest helpful materials to check out of a library: wordless picture books, interactive books, picture dictionaries, concept books, recorded stories, songs and chants, picture word flash cards.

Will I need extra supplies to use these activities with parents?

Most of our activities require little besides household objects and time to spend with the child. Some ask teachers to suggest books, word lists, letter-sounds, concepts or skills for which the child needs practice. This will allow you to target these activities more closely to the assessed need.

A few other activities ask parents to make picture cards, word cards or other helps. The easier you can make that job for parents, the more likely they will be to try the activity. Appendix A includes a few sheets of game cards and picture cards that will come in handy for some of these activities. It also includes lists that identify books that can help with specific skill areas like phonemic awareness, prediction, etc. We welcome you to add to that list, and forward the additions to Partnership For Learning.

You will find additional resources in the books listed at the end of this section, which may be available on your own shelves or on the shelves of a colleague. We've also left ample room on the next page for you to compile your own "library" of handy references for picture cards, lists, activities or other tools that will make these activities more fun and interesting for parents. You may want to copy them for your own use and add them to Appendix A.

Additional Resources

1. ***Guided Reading,*** by Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell (Heinemann, 1996)
   Includes an extensive list of popular children's books identified by reading level to help parents choose appropriate books for independent reading at home.
2. ***Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction*** by Donald R. Bear, Marcia Invernizzi, Shane Templeton, Francine Johnston (Prentice-Hall, 1999)
   Includes a set of picture cards that will be helpful for parents doing letter-sound identification and matching games, as well as phonemic awareness and phonics activities.
3. ***Much More Than ABCs: The Early Stages of Reading and Writing*** by Judith A. Schickedanz (NAEYC, 1999)
   Includes lists of predictable, alphabet, fiction and nonfiction books for young children.
4. ***Primary Literacy Centers*** by Susan Nations and Mellissa Alonso (Maupin House, 2001)

* *Do you know of other good books, websites, or organizations who can supply teachers and families with tools they can use at home? Send your ideas to Partnership For Learning, 321 N. Pine, Lansing, MI 48933; or contact the website at www.PartnershipForLearning.org.*

Using *MLPP* to Develop Positive Parent Partnerships for Literacy

"Parent-teacher collaborations, like all parent involvement, is based on mutual respect, understanding of the other's perspective and role, and the sharing of knowledge, information, and skills. Each individual in any partnership brings unique values, ideas, perspectives, and skills to the relationship; therefore, each parent partnership will be different. Family-centered practice emphasizes the family's central role in planning and making decisions about services for their child and other family members. The teacher can assist parents in assessing their child's strengths and needs, family resources, priorities, and concerns, and can help identify goals and services with the family."

From *Parents and Teachers as Partners*
Rockwell, R.E., Andre, L.C., Hawley, M.K., Harcourt Brace,1996

Meaningful parent involvement only happens in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust.

Successful schools build this trust by empowering parents through communication and support. *Teachers* share with parents their knowledge of how children learn to read, and offer practical information and strategies to help young readers tackle each new skill on the way to literacy. *Parents* educate teachers about their child's strengths and needs, as well as family interests and concerns. And they help make the decisions that affect their child's reading program and how the family will help.

The *MLPP* offers new and exciting ways to work with parents as partners.The assessments it offers allow teachers to point with confidence at where a child is, and where s/he needs to go next on the path to independent reading. It allows teachers to "de-mystify" the process of learning to read, and offers parents new and meaningful ways to get involved in their child's learning.

Creating successful partnerships

Successful partnerships don't just happen. They take good communication skills and a positive approach to involvement. Here are some things to consider as you work with the families of your students.

1. **Create a welcoming environment** in your classroom, and encourage a "family-friendly" culture in your school.

2. **Expect cooperation and collaboration** from parents. Most parents are eager to help their children learn to read, especially if they know which activities will make the most of their limited hours together.

3. **Tell parents what they can expect** their child to learn in your classroom this year. Give them a list of literacy milestones they can watch for. (You can get a good list of expected grade-level accomplishments in reading from Macomb County Early Literacy Committee or from the National Academy of Sciences' Preventing Reading

Difficulties in Young Children. The Michigan Reading Association also offers a helpful flipchart for parents. See resources.)

4. **Explain why you do** what you do in the classroom, and how the parents' role fits in. This is especially important if your school has recently changed its curriculum or approach to reading instruction.

5. **Communicate openly and often.** Build trust, so when it comes time to suggest parent interventions, they are eager to participate and know you're not wasting their time.

6. **Actively listen** to parents to learn their values, their needs, and their level of understanding.

Tips for involving "hard-to-reach" families

While it's true that most families are eager to help their children learn to read, some of the most at-risk readers come from families who may not be eager to participate in school activities. Here are some additional tips that can help you successfully reach out to these families.

1. **Learn to observe**, and recognize the strengths in each family. Whatever the form or degree, all families have strengths. Focus on those and use them to explore ways the family can help with literacy activities.

2. **Assess your values!** When working with families from different cultures, develop an awareness of your own cultural and family values and beliefs, and recognize how they influence your attitudes and behaviors. Then develop an understanding of how the cultural values and lifestyle choices of your students' parents influence their attitudes and beliefs. (*Parents and Teachers as Partners* offers a helpful tool to help you do this. See resources on page 11.)

3. **Promote positive relationships**.

   - Allow the family to tell its own story and listen carefully to family members.
   - Provide accurate, honest information to parent questions. Avoid jargon and use language that family members can understand.
   - Give parents choices and individualized alternatives for working with their child.
   - Avoid using guilt or blame to motivate parents.

"Family involvement is something that schools must decide they want to do as consistently and meaningfully as they want to do reading and mathematics. You have to have a whole program of parental involvement that is tied to your goals."

Laurel A. Clark
Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University

- Introduce parents to other staff or professionals who might help them. (i.e. reading tutors, media specialists, etc. Make school a place of many friends.)
- Never assume your training or experience has given you more knowledge about the child than the parents have.
- Demonstrate warmth, sensitivity and acceptance of yourself and of the family.
- Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know" and suggest someone who can offer more help or information.
- Examine your attitude toward children who struggle with reading. Focus on her/his strengths, not on what s/he can't do.
- Respect the family's right to choose its own level of participation.
- Introduce the family to other parents who have successfully worked with the *MLPP* interventions. Parent-to-parent networking can be a powerful tool.

Source: Parents and Teachers as Partners, p. 85-86

4. **Model activities first.** If you suspect that the parents may struggle with literacy themselves, model the activities before sending home the sheet. Use stickers, colored markers or other tools to create visual cues to remind the parents what to do for each activity.

New Ways to Think about Involvement

"Schools and teachers frequently fall into the trap of doing things the way tradition dictates—'It's always been done this way.' The majority of today's families are anything but 'the way they've always been,' and maintaining communication means finding and using innovative ways of keeping the channels open in both directions." (Parents and Teachers as Partners, p. 104)

Collecting "parent literacy stories"

Patricia A. Edwards, a professor and senior consultant at the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement at Michigan State University, has found great success in working with parents by learning new ways to talk to parents. She offers research and methods that work in her new book, *A Path to Follow: Learning to Listen to Parents* (see resources below.) Also see article by Edwards in this packet.

Reading compacts: Are they right for your school?

A compact for reading is a written agreement among families, principals, teachers and students describing how each partner can help improve the reading and other language arts skills. The U.S. Department of Education offers a guide to writing compacts to use with children from kindergarten through third grade, including those with disabilities and with limited English proficiency. (See resources on next page.)

Notes:

Resources for more information:

Literature

About Reading Instruction

Early Literacy Instruction for the New Millennium
CIERA/International Reading Association.1999.

Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children
Irene C. Fountas, Gay Su Pinnell. Heinemann, 1996

MI Climb (Clarifying Language in Michigan's Benchmarks) Project, explains each Language Arts benchmark and provides example instruction and assessment strategies that help clarify what it looks like in action. http://www.remc7.k12.mi.us/oaisd/miclimb/. Or call 517-241-4779.

Much More Than ABCs: The Early Stages of Reading and Writing by Judith A. Schickedanz . NAEYC, 1999.

Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children
National Academy of Sciences, 1998.

Reading & Writing, Grade by Grade: Primary Literacy Standards, K-3
New Standards, 1999

Start Early, Finish Strong
U.S. Dept. of Education. 877-4ED-PUBS; www.ed.gov.pubs/edpubs.html

Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success
National Research Council, National Academy Press, 1999.

Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction
Bear, D.R. et.al. Prentice Hall, Inc., 1996

Phonics They Use
Patricia Cunningham. Harper Collins College, 1995

About Working with Parents & Community Partners

A path to follow: Learning to listen to parents
Edwards, P.A.. Heinemann, 1999.

Beyond Tokenism: Parents as Partners in Literacy
Cairney, T.H. and Munsie, Lynne. Heinemann, 1995.

Bridging Cultures in Our Schools: New Approaches That Work
WestEd. 2000. 730 Harrison St., San Francisco, CA 04107-1242, 415-565-3000, www.WestEd.org

Building Successful Partnerships. National PTA, National Education Service, 2000.

Community Update. U.S. Dept. of Education
www.ed.gov/G2K/community

Compact for Reading/School-Home Activities Reading Kit
Partnership for Family Involvement in Education/ U.S. Dept. of Education. 877-ED-PUBS; www.pfie.ed.gov

Family Literacy: Young Children Learning to Read and Write
Denny Taylor, Heinemann, 1983.

Parents and Teachers as Partners.
Rockwell, R.E., Andre, L.C., Hawley, M.K., Harcourt Brace, 1996.

Parents As Partners in Education: Families and Schools Working Together
Berger, Eugenia Hepworth. Merril Press, 2000 (5th edition).

Rethinking Parental Involvement for The 21st Century: A Culturally Relevant Approach. Edwards, P.A. available in 2001

The New MegaSkills® Bond: Breakthroughs in Building the T·E·A·M for Better Schools
Rich, Dorothy. Dorothy Rich Associates, 1994.

Organizations:

Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships
Johns Hopkins University, 3505 North Charles Street, Baltimore, MD 21218; 410-516-8818. Web site: http://www.csos.jhu.edu

Macomb County ISC—Early Literacy Committee
Elaine Weber 810-228-3479; Doreen Hudson 810-228-3434

Continued next page

Resources, cont'd.

MegaSkills® Home and School Institute
1500 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20005; 202-833-1400
Web site: http://www.MegaSkillsHSI.org

Michigan Department of Education
Bonnie Rockafellow: 517-241-4779

Partnership For Learning
1-800-832-2464; Web site: www.PartnershipForLearning.org

National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL)
325 W. Main Street, Suite 200, Louisville, KY 40202-4251

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education
1201 16th Street NW, Box 39, Washington, DC 20036; 202-822-8405
Web site: http://www.ncpie.org

The Partnership for Family Involvement in Education
U.S. Department of Education. 400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20202-8173, 1-877-576-7734. Web site: http://pfie.ed.gov/

But how can I get parents involved?

The power of learning to listen to parents

by Patricia A. Edwards

Why is it necessary to work in new ways with parents? What are some new ways of communicating with parents? What can teachers learn from listening to parents? What resources are available to teachers to learn more about how to work with parents? Your success as a reading teacher depends on your finding answers to these questions.

Few teachers would disagree with my observation that today's families have changed. The families of the 90s are different than those in the 50s and 60s. Teachers must acknowledge the changing structures and culture of the family—the "new reality"—they find in today's schools. Communication with students and their parents is essential to acknowledging and dealing with these changes.

As American society changes and becomes more complex, educators must also acknowledge that the cultural makeup of classrooms is changing in conjunction with the ethnic, cultural and economic changes occurring in families. These changes encroach on the school and on the lives of the families we serve. The recurring message is that "families today are just not like we used to know them...time and people have changed...." (Leitch & Tangri, 1988, p. 73).

"… as a child's first and most important teacher, a parent can offer memories of specific formative interactions, observations on early learning efforts, and thoughts on how their own backgrounds have impacted a child's attitude toward school. In sharing their anecdotes and observations, parents give us the keys to unlock a vault of social, emotional, and educational variables."

–Patricia A. Edwards

Parents are people, too.

At the same time educators must understand that parents are not all the same. They have their own strengths and weaknesses, complexities, problems, and questions, and we must work with them and see them as more than "just parents." In my work with parents, I coined two terms, differentiated parenting and parentally appropriate, to help teachers find new ways to think about who parents are.

Differentiated parenting means recognizing that parents are different from one another in their perspectives, beliefs, and abilities to negotiate school. While parents might have the same goals for their children (i.e. to read, write, and spell well), they might have different ideas about how they can help their children accomplish these goals.

Parentally appropriate means that because parents are different, tasks and activities must be compatible with their capabilities.

For example, parents who don't read well might be very intimidated and frustrated by teachers who expect them to read to their children every night, and teachers might need to select other activities or support them in developing reading fluency. Parents who work multiple jobs or who are raising their children by themselves might not be able to attend parent conferences after school or in the early evenings, and teachers might need to make other arrangements to accommodate them. When we as teachers plan these activities and tasks, we must remember that parents want to accomplish them successfully, and we need to provide as much support to them as possible.

Traditional and nontraditional ways of communicating with parents

At different times throughout the school year parents are asked to become partners, collaborators and problem solvers, supporters, advisors and co-decision makers. Sometimes, they are asked simply to be an interested audience (Henderson, Marburger, & Ooms, 1986). In whatever capacity parents choose to participate in school activities, one thing is evident. With few exceptions, each parent was recruited by means of traditional forms of school communication: newsletters, telephone calls and meetings.

Traditional approaches

Most of us are familiar with the traditional forms of **one-way communication** Berger (1991) highlights in her book, *Parents as Partners in Education*:

- August Letters
- district newsletters
- handbooks
- happy-grams
- newspapers
- parent questionnaires
- spontaneous notes
- suggestion boxes
- yearbooks

We might also recall the ever-popular **two-way forms of communication** she highlights:

- breakfast meetings
- carnivals
- back-to-school nights
- fairs
- exchanges
- home visits
- neighborhood visits
- open-door policies
- picnics
- school programs
- suppers
- telephone calls
- workshops
- Saturday morning sessions
- parent-teacher associations
- early-in-the-year contacts
- school maintenance projects

Although schools have been using a variety of ways to communicate with parents over the years, for the most part traditional approaches have been aimed at recruiting mainstream parents, especially those who are easy to reach. Usually, the more traditional approaches show little regard for the diversity of lifestyles or literacy levels among parents. As a result, few schools are communicating effectively with the very parents who would most benefit from a positive involvement in the school.

As problems resulting from this imbalance grow, more researchers are beginning to encourage educators to examine the effectiveness of their current parent-involvement approaches. France & Meeks (1987) warn that many parents "are largely being ignored by the schools, which go on sending home notices, report cards, homework assignments, information packets, survey forms, and permission slips as though they believe every parent can read and write." (p. 227)

Unfortunately, there are many parents who cannot read and write and who are unable to respond to the traditional forms of written communication sent by the school. For these parents, new forms of communication must be devised.

Nontraditional approaches

France & Meeks (1987) suggest, "When there are indicators that parents are failing to respond to parent involvement programs because of literacy problems, teachers should take the time to call and arrange conferences during which they can describe some of the ways in which academic success can be fostered outside of direct instruction." (p. 226) Although I support France and Meeks' teacher-motivated conference approach, I would like to suggest additional ideas.

Sometimes asking community leaders to contact parents who have literacy problems will provide the incentive parents need to become willing participants in a literacy program. Another approach is to ask parents to contact other parents who would benefit from the program. Both of these grassroots methods can build strong ties between the home and school, which, if carefully nurtured, will improve with time.

Regardless of the approaches schools employ to involve both mainstream and non-mainstream parents in their programs, educators should be sensitive to the various literacy levels of parents. No longer can one type of communication be effective with every group. Above all, educators should avoid making the mistake that many well-intentioned, but uninformed teachers make, when they remain insensitive to the diverse literacy levels of parents. Usually, communication from such educators misses the mark altogether, either insulting the parents who read well or alienating those who cannot.

The importance of listening to parents

The diverse and difficult needs of today's children far outstrip the ability of any one institution to meet them. Yet one of the richest resources for understanding a child's early learning experiences—parents—is quite often the most frequently overlooked. In a recent book, *A Path to Follow*, my co-authors and I suggests that parent "stories" can be a highly effective, collaborative tool for accessing knowledge that may not be obvious, but would obviously be of benefit.

I, along with my co-authors have defined "stories" as narratives gained from open-ended conversations and/or interviews, where parents respond to questions designed to shed light on traditional and nontraditional early literacy activities in the home. After all, as a child's first and most important teacher, a parent can offer memories of specific formative interactions, observations on early learning efforts, and thoughts on how their own backgrounds have impacted a child's attitude toward school. In sharing their anecdotes and observations, parents give us the keys to unlock a vault of social, emotional, and educational variables.

The secondary benefit to the story approach, of course, is the empowerment that parents feel when they are given the chance to participate in a personally meaningful way—one that respects their viewpoint. As

parents and schools continue to wrestle with prodigious challenges—shifting family demographics, time constraints, cultural divides, privacy issues, and of course, economics—stories remain a nonthreatening and practical vehicle for collaboration.

Questions teachers can ask to begin a new way to listen to parents:

1. Can you describe "something" about your home learning environment that you would like the school to build upon because you feel that this "something" would enhance your child's learning potential at school?

2. All children have potential. Did you feel that _____ had some particular talent or "gift" early on? If so, what was it? What did your child do to make you think that s/he had this potential? Were there specific things you did as a parent to strengthen this talent?

3. What do you and your child enjoy doing together?

4. Is there something about your child that might not be obvious to the teacher, but might positively or negatively affect her/his performance in school if the teacher knew? If so, what would that something be?

5. What activities/hobbies do you participate in as an individual? With your spouse or friends? As a family?

Patricia A. Edwards *is a professor in the department of teacher education and a senior researcher at the National Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement at Michigan State University.*

Resources for Learning How to Work with Parents

Atkins, J., Bastiani, J., with Good, J. (1988). Listening To Parents: An Approach To The Improvement Of Home/ School Relations. New York: Croom Helm.

Batey, C. S. (1996). Parents Are Lifesavers: A Handbook For Parent Involvement In Schools. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Berger, E. H. (1991). Parents As Partners In Education: The School And Home Working Together. Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill.

Delago-Gaitan, C. (1990). Literacy For Empowerment: The Role Of Parents In Children's Education. New York: The Falmer Press.

Delago-Gaitan, C., & Trueba, H. (1991). Crossing Cultural Borders: Education For Immigrant Families In America. New York: The Falmer Press.

Edwards, P. A. (in press). Rethinking Parental Involvement For The 21st Century: A Culturally Relevant Approach. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Edwards, P. A., Pleasants, H. M., & Franklin, S. H. (1999). A Path To Follow: Learning To Listen To Parents. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Fuller, M. L., & Olsen, G. (editor, 1998). Home-school Relations: Working Successfully With Parents And Families. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Harry, B. (1992). Cultural Diversity, Families, And The Special Education System. New York: Teachers College Press.

Henderson, A. T., Marburger, C. L., & Ooms, T. (1986). Beyond The Bake Sale: An Educator's Guide To Working With Parents. Columbia, MD: National Committee for Citizens in Education.

Kaplan, L. (editor, 1992). Education And The Family. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Lareau, A. (1989). Home Advantage: Social Class And Parental Intervention In Elementary Education. London: The Falmer Press.

McCaleb, S. P. (1994). Building Communities Of Learners: A Collaboration Among Teachers, Students, Families, And Community. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Power, B. (1999). Parent Power: Energizing Home-school Communication, A Guide For Teachers & Schools. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Rioux, J. W., & Berla, N. (1993). Innovations In Parent And Family Involvement. Princeton Junction, NJ: Eye on Education.

Swap, S. M. (1993). Developing Home-school Partnerships. New York: Teachers College Press.

Vopat, J. (1998). Parent Leadership: "It Doesn't Happen Just Because You Say So". York, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.

Vopat, J. (1998). More Than Bake Sales: The Resource Guide To Family Involvement In Education. York, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.

Vopat, J. (1994). The Parent Project: A Workshop Approach To Parent Involvement. York, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.

Balanced Literacy

By Sharen Turnbull

Successful literacy programs are the result of providing instruction that is well balanced in several areas. Here's what to look for in a balanced literacy program.

Balanced environment

Where we have high expectations, yet children learn at their own pace. Teachers can create a balanced classroom by providing experiences that are neither too easy nor too difficult, where children are asked to perform at a level just beyond their comfort zone. They should be encouraged to take risks in an environment that is both safe and supportive. It is here that confidence grows and knowledge is expanded.

Balanced content

Were there is a balance of activities in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. We don't learn to speak without listening, to write without reading, or to read without writing. When students read what they have written, they increase their reading vocabulary. Children read good literature, using what they learn from the way authors write, as models for their own writing.

Balanced responsibility

Where teachers gradually release the responsibility of the learning to the child. Teachers begin by reading and writing aloud **to** your child, modeling the kind of behaviors good readers and writers use. Teachers then design lessons where the responsibility for the reading and writing is shared **with** your child. Once students show increased skill, small group instruction is used. Here the teacher supports and guides the practice. Finally, students are allowed to read **by themselves**, having developed the skills necessary to increase their reading and writing development.

Balanced variety

Where there is a variety of different types if literature. Students read and study fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and many other kinds of text. They study the characteristics of each type and use that information to help them understand what they read, and as a model in their writing.

Balanced instruction

Where children learn and use different strategies when they come to a word they don't know or a passage they don't understand. This means learning to use phonic, language, and sentence-meaning cues. Using any of these cues too much or too little can result in students who are unable to deal effectively with all the reading situations they may encounter.

Balance in everything has been a piece of wisdom handed down through the ages. It holds true in children's' literacy development as well. Look for a literacy program that balances *all* aspects of literacy. Only that kind of instruction will ensure that every

child becomes a reader by the end of third grade!

Sharen Turnbull is a teacher and reading consultant from Waterford Public Schools. She is the 1999-2000 winner of the Christa McAuliffe Fellowship Program. This competitive award goes to outstanding and experienced teachers, allowing them to help develop and implement state-wide school improvement efforts, to enhance their own professional skills, and to improve classroom instruction.

Making a Difference Means Making It Different

Honoring Children's Rights to Excellent Reading Instruction

International Reading Association Outlines Set of Children's Rights: Released at the National Press Club, January 10, 2000

1. Children have a right to appropriate early reading instruction based on their individual needs. No single method or single combination of methods can successfully teach all children to read.

2. Children have a right to reading instruction that builds both skill and the desire to read increasingly complex materials. Children need well-developed repertoires of reading comprehension and study strategies.

3. Children have a right to well-prepared teachers who keep their skills up to date through effective professional development. Teachers skilled in the wide range of methods for teaching reading must be at the core of all reform efforts.

4. Children have a right to access a wide variety of books and other reading material in classroom, school and community libraries. Children who do a substantial amount of voluntary reading are positive about reading and are good readers.

5. Children have the right to reading assessment that identifies their strengths as well as their needs and involves them in making decisions about their own learning. Assessments must provide information for instructional decision making as well as for public accountability.

6. Children who are struggling as learners have a right to receive supplemental instruction from professionals specifically prepared to teach reading. No school can provide adequate reading and writing instruction for all children without the specific expertise in reading offered by specialists.

7. Children have a right to reading instruction that involves parents and communities in their academic lives. This will ensure that all children learn to read and write, and requires the cooperation of a wide group of stakeholders. It takes the whole community to teach all children to read and write.

8. Children have a right to reading instruction that makes skilled use of their first language skills. Initial literacy instruction should be provided in a child's native language whenever possible. Policies on initial instruction should support the professional judgment of teachers without federal, state, or local mandates.

9. Children have the right to equal access to technology used for the improvement of reading instruction. Much needs to be

done in the area of technology. Schools, teacher education institutions, professional development providers, and researchers at all levels must be encouraged and supported as they devote more energy and resources to this area.

10. Children have a right to classrooms that optimize learning opportunities. If we are serious about improving reading achievement we must he held accountable for providing appropriate student teacher ratios, certified teachers, discipline supported by families and the community, and buildings in sound physical condition.

For further information on the International Reading Association's position statement, "Making a Difference Means Making It Different: Honoring Children's Rights to Excellent Reading Instruction," contact the Association's Public Information Office at 302-731-1600 ext. 293.